

Chapter 7: Rationality & Religious Belief

Myself when young did eagerly frequent
Doctor and Saint, and heard great Argument
About it and about: but evermore
Came out by the same Door as in I went.

-----Omar Khyammam

There are arguments for the existence of God, and arguments which purport to prove that there is no God. And there are arguments like Pascal's Wager, to be considered in this chapter, which aim to show that, leaving aside the question of whether there is a God or not, religious belief is rational.

The question of whether or not there is a God is not a scientific question since it does not concern any matter pertaining to the natural world. It is a metaphysical question and like all metaphysical questions is a disputed question. For Christians (including your instructor) there's good news and bad news. The bad news is that atheism is reasonable. The good news is that religious belief is also reasonable.

1 ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD: A SAMPLER

1.1 ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

The focus of the argument is the thesis that, if there is a God, then God's existence is necessary...

The ontological argument goes back to St. Anselm (1033/34–1109), but I shall explore a current version relying heavily on the principle that if something is possibly necessarily the case, then it is necessarily the case (or, to put it redundantly, it is necessarily necessary). The principle can be illustrated in the case of propositions. Six is the smallest perfect number (that number which is equal to the sum of its divisors including one but not including itself) does not seem to be the sort of thing that might just happen to be true. Rather, either it is necessarily true or necessarily false. If the latter, it is not possible, if the former, it is possible. If one knows that it is possible that six is the smallest perfect number then one has good reason to believe that. Do we have reason to think it is possible God exists necessarily? ...The fact that the concept of God as a necessarily existing reality seems to be coherently conceived widely across time and cultures is some evidence that the concept is coherent...thus can also contribute to believing it is possible God exists. There is an old philosophical precept that from the fact that something exists, it follows that it is possible (ab esse ed posse valet consequential). A related principle is that evidence that something exists is evidence that it is possible that such a thing exists. There does

not appear to be anything amiss in their thinking of God as necessarily existing...If we are successful in establishing the possibility that God necessarily exists, the conclusion follows that it is necessarily the case that God exists.

There have been hundreds of objections and replies to this argument. [One] objection is that the ontological argument cannot get off the ground because of the question-begging nature of its premise that if there is a God, then God exists necessarily... [But] One can entertain the existence of unicorns and their necessary features (that necessarily if there were unicorns, there would exist single-horned beasts) without believing that there are unicorns.

Finally, consider the objection that, if successful in providing reasons to believe that God exists, the ontological argument could be used to establish the existence of a whole array of other items, like perfect islands. Replies to this sort of objection have typically questioned whether it makes sense to think of an island (a physical thing) as existing necessarily or as having maximal excellence on a par with God.

1.2 COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

There are various versions [of the Cosmological Argument]. Some argue that the cosmos had an initial cause outside it, a First Cause in time. Others argue that the cosmos has a necessary, sustaining cause from instant to instant. The two versions are not mutually exclusive...

Both versions of the argument ask us to consider the cosmos in its present state. Is the world as we know it something that necessarily exists? At least with respect to ourselves, the planet, the solar system and the galaxy, it appears not. With respect to these items in the cosmos, it makes sense to ask why they exist rather than not. In relation to scientific accounts of the natural world, such enquiries into causes make abundant sense and are perhaps even essential presuppositions of the natural sciences...So, why does the cosmos exist? If we explain the contingent existence of the cosmos (or states of the cosmos) only in terms of other contingent things (earlier states of the cosmos, say), then a full cosmic explanation will never be attained. At this point the two versions of the argument divide.

Arguments to a First Cause in time contend that a continuous temporal regress from one contingent existence to another would never account for the existence of the cosmos, and they conclude that it is more reasonable to accept there was a First Cause than to accept either a regress or the claim that the cosmos just came into being from nothing. Arguments to a sustaining cause of the cosmos claim that explanations of why something exists now cannot be adequate without assuming a present, contemporaneous sustaining cause...

It has been objected that both versions of the cosmological argument set out an inflated picture of what explanations are reasonable. Why should the cosmos as a whole need an explanation? If everything in the cosmos can be explained, albeit through infinite, regressive

accounts, what is left to explain? One may reply, either by denying that infinite regresses actually do satisfactorily explain or by charging that the failure to seek an explanation for the whole is arbitrary. The question, "Why is there a cosmos?" seems a perfectly intelligible one. If there are accounts for things in the cosmos, why not for the whole?...

1.3 TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT (ARGUMENT FROM DESIGN)

[Teleological] arguments focus on characteristics of the cosmos that seem to reflect the design or intentionality of God or, more modestly, of one or more powerful, intelligent God-like agents. Part of the argument may be formulated as providing evidence that the cosmos is the sort of reality that would be produced by an intelligent being, and then arguing that positing this source is more reasonable than agnosticism or denying it. As in the case of the cosmological argument, the defender of the teleological argument may want to claim only to be giving us some reason for thinking there is a God. Note the way the various arguments might then be brought to bear on each other. If successful, the teleological argument may provide some reason for thinking that the First Cause of the cosmological argument is purposive, while the ontological argument provides some reason for thinking that it makes sense to posit a being that has Divine attributes and necessarily exists. Behind all of them an argument from religious experience may provide some initial reasons to seek further support for a religious conception of the cosmos and to question the adequacy of naturalism...

1.4 ARGUMENT FROM RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Perhaps the justification most widely offered for religious belief concerns the occurrence of religious experience or the cumulative weight of testimony of those claiming to have had religious experiences. Putting the latter case in theistic terms, the argument appeals to the fact that many people have testified that they have felt God's presence. Does such testimony provide evidence that God exists?..

Objection: Religious experience cannot be experience of God for experience is only sensory and if God is non-physical, God cannot be sensed.

Reply: The thesis that experience is only sensory can be challenged...[S]ome experiences (as when one has 'a feeling' someone is present but without having any accompanying sensations) that might provide grounds for questioning a narrow sensory notion of experience...

Objection: Because religious experience is unique, how could one ever determine whether it is reliable? We simply lack the ability to examine the object of religious experience in order to test whether the reported experiences are indeed reliable.

Reply: As we learned from Descartes, all our experiences of external objects face a problem of uniqueness. It is possible in principle that all our senses are mistaken and we do not have the public, embodied life we think we lead. We cannot step out of our own subjectivity to vindicate our ordinary perceptual beliefs any more than in the religious case...

Objection: Reports of religious experience differ radically and the testimony of one religious party neutralizes the testimony of others. The testimony of Hindus cancel out the testimony of Christians. The testimony of atheists to experience God's absence cancels out the testimony of "believers."

Reply: Several replies might be offered here...Perhaps if there is a God, God does not think this is altogether bad, and actually desires religious belief to be fashioned under conditions of trust and faith rather than knowledge. The diversity of religious experiences has caused some defenders of the argument from religious experience to mute their conclusion. Thus, Gutting (1982) contends that the argument is not strong enough fully to vindicate a specific religious tradition, but that it is strong enough to overturn an anti-religious naturalism. Other defenders use their specific tradition to deal with ostensibly competing claims based on different sorts of religious experiences. Theists have proposed that more impersonal experiences of the Divine represent only one aspect of God. God is a person or is person-like, but God can also be experienced, for example, as sheer luminous unity. Hindus have claimed the experience of God as personal is only one stage in the overall journey of the soul to truth, the highest truth being that Brahman transcends personhood...

1.5 A MIRACLE AT MARSH CHAPEL?: CAUSAL AND EVIDENTIAL REASONS

One worry people have about religious experience is that it can be induced by various techniques and by chemical means. At the (in)famous March Chapel experiment, a group of theology students were given magic mushrooms at a Good Friday service at Boston University's Marsh Chapel and proceeded to have mystical experiences that were indistinguishable from the non-chemically-induced sort. The experiment was duplicated recently at the Johns Hopkins University.¹

Other research has suggested that there is a 'God spot' in the brain which controls religious belief and which, when activated, produces religious experience.² One way or another what this means is that there is a neurochemical basis for religious belief and mystical experience.

Does this undermine arguments from religious experience?

Arguably it doesn't. There is, after all, a neurochemical basis for *all* of our experience, including our veridical experiences of ordinary material objects in our vicinity. Our beliefs about the disposition of these items in our environment are caused by our neurochemical events. Light hits my eye, travels down my optic nerve, stimulates the visual cortex of my brain and causes me to form the belief that the cat is on the mat. Noting that my belief was caused by electro-

¹ See *Wall Street Journal* July 11, 2006 "Go Ask Alice: Mushroom Drug is Studied Anew" at http://online.wsj.com/public/article/SB115258280486902994-oklo62E597AxzQTYEo9_1lquu8E_20070710.html

² <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/belief-and-the-brains-god-spot-1641022.html>

chemical activity in my brain doesn't show that I *don't* have any good *evidential* reasons for holding that belief.

Whether or not there is a discrete 'God spot' in the brain we should certainly expect that religious beliefs and religious experiences are caused by neural events just like all of our other beliefs and experiences and like them may be induced by direct stimulation of the brain or by chemical means. Discovering causal reasons for a person's holding a belief doesn't preclude his having good evidential reasons.

2 ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

2.1 THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

If there is a God who is omnipotent, omniscient and completely good, why is there evil? The problem of evil is the most widely considered objection to theism in both western and eastern philosophy. There are two general versions of the problem: the deductive or logical version, which asserts that the existence of any evil at all (regardless of its role in producing good) is incompatible with God's existence; and the probabilistic version, which asserts that given the quantity and severity of evil that actually exists, it is unlikely that God exists...

In the face of the problem of evil, some philosophers and theologians deny that God is all-powerful and all-knowing. John Stuart Mill took this line, and panentheist theologians today also question the traditional treatments of Divine power. According to panentheism, God is immanent in the world, suffering with the oppressed and working to bring good out of evil, although in spite of God's efforts, evil will invariably mar the created order. Another response is to think of God as being very different from a moral agent...that what it means for God to be good is different from what it means for an agent to be morally...

In part, the magnitude one takes the problem of evil to pose for theism will depend upon one's commitments in other areas of philosophy, especially ethics, epistemology and metaphysics. If in ethics you hold that there should be no preventable suffering for any reason, no matter what the cause or consequence, then the problem of evil will conflict with accepting traditional theism. ...[I]f you do not believe there is free will, then you will not be moved by any appeal to the positive value of free will and its role in bringing about good as offsetting its role in bringing about evil.

Theistic responses to the problem of evil distinguish between a defense and a theodicy. A defense seeks to establish that rational belief that God exists is still possible (when the defense is employed against the logical version of the problem of evil) and that the existence of evil does not make it improbable that God exists (when used against the probabilistic version)...A theodicy is more ambitious, and is typically part of a broader project, arguing that it is reasonable to believe that God exists on the basis of the good as well as the evident evil of the

cosmos. In a theodicy, the project is not to account for each and every evil, but to provide an overarching framework within which to understand at least roughly how the evil that occurs is part of some overall good—for instance, the overcoming of evil is itself a great good. In practice, a defense and a theodicy often appeal to similar factors, the first and foremost being what many call the Greater Good Defense.

Evil and the Greater Good: In the Greater Good Defense, it is contended that evil can be understood as either a necessary accompaniment to bringing about greater goods or an integral part of these goods. Thus, in a version often called the Free Will Defense, it is proposed that free creatures who are able to care for each other and whose welfare depends on each other's freely chosen action constitute a good...

Some have based an argument from the problem of evil on the charge that this is not the best possible world. If there were a supreme, maximally excellent God, surely God would bring about the best possible creation. Because this is not the best possible creation, there is no supreme, maximally excellent God...[M]any now reply that the whole notion of a best possible world, like the highest possible number, is incoherent. For any world that can be imagined with such and such happiness, goodness, virtue and so on, a higher one can be imagined. If the notion of a best possible world is incoherent, would this count against belief that there could be a supreme, maximally excellent being? It has been argued on the contrary that Divine excellences admit of upper limits or maxima that are not quantifiable in a serial fashion (for example, Divine omnipotence involves being able to do anything logically or metaphysically possible, but does not require actually doing the greatest number of acts or a series of acts of which there can be no more).

Those concerned with the problem of evil clash over the question of how one assesses the likelihood of Divine existence. Someone who reports seeing no point to the existence of evil or no justification for God to allow it seems to imply that if there were a point they would see it. Note the difference between seeing no point and not seeing a point. In the cosmic case, is it clear that if there were a reason justifying the existence of evil, we would see it...[W]e should not take our failure to see what reason God might have for allowing evil to count as grounds for thinking that there is no reason. This later move has led to a position commonly called skeptical theism...

2.2 THE VERIFICATIONIST CHALLENGE

Logical positivism [a philosophical school that flourished in the early to mid-20th century] promoted an empiricist principle of meaning, which was deemed lethal for religious belief. The following empiricist principle is representative: for a propositional claim (statement) to be meaningful, it must either be about the bare formal relations between ideas such as those enshrined in mathematics and analytic definitions ('A is A', 'triangles are three-sided') or there must in principle be perceptual experience providing evidence of whether the claim is true or false...Ostensibly factual claims that have no implications for our empirical experience are empty

of content. In line with this form of positivism, A. J. Ayer (1910–1989) and others claimed that religious beliefs were meaningless. How might one empirically confirm that God is omnipresent or loving or that Krishna is an avatar of Vishnu? In an important debate in the 1950s and 1960s, philosophical arguments about God were likened to debates about the existence and habits of an unobservable gardener, based on a parable by John Wisdom in 1944–1945.

Flew writes:

Let us begin with a parable. It is a parable developed from a tale told by John Wisdom in his haunting and revolutionary article "Gods." Once upon a time two explorers came upon a clearing in the jungle. In the clearing were growing many flowers and many weeds. One explorer says, "Some gardener must tend this plot." The other disagrees, "There is no gardener." So they pitch their tents and set a watch. No gardener is ever seen. "But perhaps he is an invisible gardener." So they set up a barbed-wire fence. They electrify it. They patrol with bloodhounds. (For they remember how H. G. Wells's *The Invisible Man* could be both smelt and touched though he could not be seen.) But no shrieks ever suggest that some intruder has received a shock. No movements of the wire ever betray an invisible climber. The bloodhounds never give cry. Yet still the Believer is not convinced. "But there is a gardener, invisible, intangible, insensible, to electric shocks, a gardener who has no scent and makes no sound, a gardener who comes secretly to look after the garden which he loves." At last the Sceptic despairs, "But what remains of your original assertion? Just how does what you call an invisible, intangible, eternally elusive gardener differ from an imaginary gardener or even from no gardener at all?"

In this parable we can see how what starts as an assertion, that something exist or that there is some analogy between certain complexes of phenomena, may be reduced step by step to an altogether different status...A fine brash hypothesis may thus be killed by inches, the death by a thousand qualifications.

And in this, it seems to me, lies the peculiar danger, the endemic evil, of theological utterance. Take such utterances as "God has a plan," "God created the world," "God loves us as a father loves his children." They look at first sight very much like assertions, vast cosmological assertions. Of course, this is no sure sign that they either are, or are intended to be, assertions...

Now to assert that such and such is the case is necessarily equivalent to denying that such and such is not the case...For if the utterance is indeed an assertion, it will necessarily be equivalent to a denial of the negation of the assertion. And anything which would count against the assertion, or which would induce the speaker to withdraw it and to admit that it had been mistaken, must be part of (or the whole of) the meaning of the negation of that assertion. [I]f there is nothing which a putative

assertion denies then there is nothing which it asserts either: and so it is not really an assertion. When the Sceptic in the parable asked the Believer, "Just how does what you call an invisible, intangible, eternally elusive gardener differ from an imaginary gardener or even from no gardener at all?" he was suggesting that the Believer's earlier statement had been so eroded by qualification that it was no longer an assertion at all.³

The idea of a gardener who is not just invisible but who also cannot be detected by any sensory faculty seemed nonsense. It seemed like nonsense because they said there was no difference between an imperceptible gardener and no gardener at all. Using this garden analogy and others crafted with the same design, Antony Flew...made the case that religious claims do not pass the empirical test of meaning. The field of philosophy of religion in the 1950s and 1960s was largely an intellectual battlefield where the debates centered on whether religious beliefs were meaningful or conceptually absurd...

In the history of the debate over positivism, the most radical charge was that positivism is self-refuting. The empiricist criterion of meaning itself does not seem to be a statement that expresses the formal relation of ideas, nor does it appear to be empirically verifiable. How might one empirically verify the principle? At best, the principle of verification seems to be a recommendation as to how to describe those statements that positivists are prepared to accept as meaningful. But then, how might a dispute about which other statements are meaningful be settled in a non-arbitrary fashion?...Also worrisome was the wholesale rejection by positivists of ethics as a cognitive, normative practice. The dismissal of ethics as non-cognitive had some embarrassing ad hominum force against an empiricist like Ayer, who regarded ethical claims as lacking any truth value and yet at the same time he construed empirical knowledge in terms of having the right to certain beliefs. Can an ethics of belief be preserved if one dispenses with the normativity of ethics?

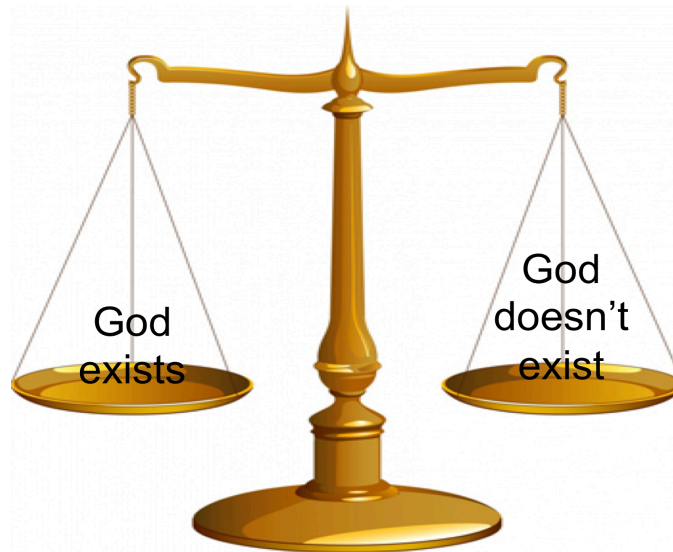
The strict empiricist account of meaning was also charged as meaningless on the grounds that there is no coherent, clear, basic level of experience with which to test propositional claims...A mystic might well claim to experience the unity of a timeless spirit everywhere present. Ayer allowed that in principle mystical experience might give meaning to religious terms. Those who concede this appeared to be on a slippery slope leading from empirical verificationism to mystical verificationism. A growing number of philosophers in the 1960s and 1970s were led to conclude that the empiricist challenge was not decisive...

2.3 ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD: CONCLUSION

There are no absolutely compelling arguments for the existence of God. There are no absolutely compelling arguments for the non-existence of God or the nonsensicality of theological claims.

³ Anthony Flew. "Theology and Falsification" excerpted in [Reason and Responsibility](#) (1968).

So...what's a rational person to do?



3 RATIONAL DECISION-MAKING

If the preceding discussion is correct then there is no compelling evidential reasons either for or against religious belief. The question of whether or not God exists is, like all puzzles in metaphysics, a disputed question. There are pros and cons for both sides. There are smart, informed, reasonable people on both sides.

So what should we do? Given that there are no evidential reasons that compel us to jump one way or the other, should we suspend judgment? Or should we jump for one side? And if so, which one and why?

3.1 THE JAMES-CLIFFORD DEBATE

This poses the larger question of whether it is ever rational to hold a belief without decisive evidential reasons.

Is it ever rational to believe any proposition (not necessarily theological) without compelling evidence? William Clifford (1845 – 1879), in “The Ethics of Belief” argued that it was not—indeed that it was wrong to believe anything on insufficient evidence. William James (1842 – 1910), the American psychologist and philosopher disagreed and challenged Clifford in his essay, ‘The Will to Believe’.



It is wrong always,
everywhere, and for anyone
to believe anything on
insufficient evidence

Williams argues that in a range of cases where we do not have compelling evidence, suspending belief is neither feasible nor desirable. Even apart from evidential reasons, there may be pragmatic reasons for holding a belief: believing some things may have practical value. Holding some beliefs, whether true or false, benefits us. And in some cases, beliefs become self-fulfilling prophecies...for good or ill.

So James argues that there are at least some cases where belief without sufficient evidential reasons is rational. Here is an example. Suppose I'm about to enter a room full of strangers—a party where I don't know anyone. I want to have a good time so I want to get on with them. I don't know who the heck they are so I have no particular evidential reason to believe that they will like me but, James argues, in a case like this it would be rational for me, even in the absence of evidential reasons, to crank up the belief that these people will like me.



William James Argument

1. I want people to like me
2. I know that believing that people will like me will make it more probable that people like me.
3. It's rational to do what it takes to make getting what you want more probable.
4. Therefore, it's rational to believe that people will like me even in the absence of evidence.

But can I choose to believe? I can't choose to believe in the way I can choose to raise my arm but I can decide to believe when I judge the evidence to be "good enough." And, even in the absence of evidence, I can psych myself up...



3.2 RATIONAL CHOICE

Now assuming that I can get myself to believe certain things, belief acquisition is, in at least some cases, a decision. Given that we have some degree of choice in the matter, what should we believe when there are no compelling evidential reasons in support of either side? More generally, how should we make decisions under uncertainty. And, most fundamentally, how should we as rational choosers make decisions?

To make things simpler, let's just consider **prudential decisions**, that is purely self-interested decisions where a person's goal is to maximize his own utility. Utility is understood alternatively as pleasure, happiness or preference-satisfaction. Whatever it is, it's what contributes to our well-being, what we're after insofar as we're self-interested. So as rational, self-interested choosers, interested in maximizing our own utility, we weigh the benefits of our action for ourselves, understood the utility it gets us, against the costs understood as disutilities or negative utilities.

How do we choose? Sometimes, when we know the consequences of an action, we can just weigh the pros and cons—the utilities attached to those consequences. Shall I have that gooey dessert? Pro: yum! Con: a gazillion calories. Of course there's a problem here because the calories and the yum are incommensurable. But we could think of them in terms of the common coin of utility as a way of comparing their relative importance to us:



Yum!..... + 5

Weight gain..... - 10

Conclusion: probably not worth it

Of course assigning those numbers is just suggestive—just an approximation of the relative importance of our various interests. And we can be mistaken or self-deceived about that.

In most cases though when we make our choices we don't know what the consequences will be. In making such decisions under uncertainty we need to know not just what utilities to assign to the consequences—we need to know how probable it is that a given consequence will occur. And the probability of our getting those results isn't in our control. The consequences of our actions are determined by the way the world is, and by the choices of other people.

So, suppose you are contemplating a potential relationship. In addition to the considering whether your potential partner suits you, you also need to know whether s/he will respond favorably. So you play the game of He-Loves-Me-He-Loves-Me-Not:

	He loves me	He loves me not
Ask out	+ 10	- 10
Don't ask out	0	0

Asking out is risky: if your potential partner responds favorably you get a big payoff but if you're rebuffed it's humiliating. On the other hand, nothing ventured, nothing gained. You can avoid risk by not asking out but then there's no chance of a payoff.

Life is like that. Most decisions under uncertainty are hard choices where the best outcome is the least probable. So typically, in our life decisions, we make tradeoffs—accepting high risks in hopes of getting high utility or settling for less potential utility in order to play it safe.

Life is full of hard choices...



But, according to Pascal, some⁴ decisions under uncertainty are no-brainers. In at least one case we don't have to balance utilities against risks, costs against benefits or make trade-offs. Betting on the existence of God provides the greatest possible benefits with no risk!

3.3 PASCAL'S WAGER⁵

Traditional, epistemic arguments hold that God exists; examples include arguments from cosmology, design, ontology, and experience. Modern, pragmatic arguments hold that, regardless of whether God exists, believing in God is good for us, or is the right thing to do; examples include William James's will to believe and Blaise Pascal's wager.

Pascal — French philosopher, scientist, mathematician and probability theorist (1623-1662) — argues that if we don't know whether God exists then we



⁴ In logic, "some" always means at least one but not necessarily more than one.

⁵ Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy

should play it safe rather than risk being sorry...

To put the matter more generally: a given action (say, buying a ticket) is associated with a set of possible outcomes (say, winning the grand prize, winning the consolation prize, or losing); each outcome has a certain value or “utility” (the utility of winning might be the value of the prize minus the cost of the ticket); the “expectation” for each outcome is equal to its utility multiplied by the probability of its happening; the expectation for a given action is the sum of the expectations for each possible associated outcome. The course of action having the maximum expectation is the rational one to follow.

3.4 A. THE SUPER-DOMINANCE ARGUMENT

Pascal begins with a two-by-two matrix: either God exists or does not, and either you believe or do not.

	God exists	God doesn't exist
Believe	Eternal bliss	250 utiles
Don't Believe	Eternal Misery	200 utiles

If God exists then theists will enjoy eternal bliss (cell a), while atheists will suffer eternal damnation (cell b). If God does not exist then theists will enjoy finite happiness before they die (say 250 units worth), and atheists will enjoy finite happiness too, though not so much because they will experience angst rather than the comforts of religion. Regardless of whether God exists, then, theists have it better than atheists; hence belief in God is the most rational belief to have.

3.5 B. THE EXPECTATIONS ARGUMENT

What if the atheist is a happy hedonist, or if the theist is a miserable puritan? In that case the value of cell (d) is greater than that of (c), and the dominance argument no longer works. However, if there is a 50-50 chance that God exists then we can calculate the expectations as follows:

	God exists	God doesn't exist
Believe	+ infinity	something finite
Don't Believe	- infinity	something finite

The expectation for believing in God = positive infinity \times $\frac{1}{2}$ plus something finite \times $\frac{1}{2}$ = positive infinity; the expectation for not believing = negative infinity \times $\frac{1}{2}$ plus something finite \times $\frac{1}{2}$ = negative infinity. Hence it is rational to believe in God.

3.6 C. THE DOMINATING EXPECTATIONS ARGUMENT

It's unlikely that the probability of God's existing is exactly one-half, but this does not matter. Due to the infinite value in cell (a), if God's existence has any finite probability then the expectation for believing in God will be infinite. Furthermore, this infinity will swamp the values in cells (b), (c), and (d), so long as (c) is not infinitely negative and neither (b) nor (d) is infinitely positive.

3.7 THE MANY-GODS OBJECTION: DO RIVAL RELIGIOUS OPTIONS UNDERMINE EACH OTHER?

Pascal's compatriot Denis Diderot replied to the wager that an ayatollah or "imam could just as well reason the same way." His point is that decision theory cannot decide among the various religions practiced in the world; it gives no warrant for believing in Pascal's Catholicism, or even in a generic Judeo-Christianity. The reason is that Tables I and II beg the question in favor of a certain kind of theism; a more complete matrix must consider at least the following possibilities.

	Yaweh exists	Allah exists
Worship Yaweh	Infinite reward	Infinite punishment
Worship Allah	Infinite punishment	Infinite reward

In reply, Pascalians offer a number of defenses, including generic theism...Some acknowledge that Pascal's wager cannot decide among religions, yet maintain that "it at least gets us to theism." The idea is that Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Moslems, and devil-worshippers can all legitimately use decision theory to conclude that it's best to believe in some supreme being.

3.8 THE EXISTENCE OF GOD AND THE RATIONALITY OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF

The question of whether religious belief is rational is a different question from the question of whether God exists. The Ontological, Cosmological and Teleological Arguments and the Argument from Religious Experience are arguments for the existence of God. Pascal's Wager is not an argument for the existence of God: it begins with the recognition that there is no compelling evidence for or against the existence of God. It purports to show that even without decisive evidential reasons to believe in God, we nevertheless have compelling pragmatic reasons for religious belief.

If Pascal is right then, more generally, contra Clifford, it is sometime rational to hold beliefs for which we do not have sufficient evidential reasons.